

# Lawrence, Andover and North Andover Inter-Faith Team

## Public Comment to the Energy Efficiency Advisory Council Jan. 23, 2020 meeting

By Rev. Joel Almonó, co-leader of the Merrimack Valley Inter-Faith Team and Rector of Grace Episcopal Church, Lawrence, MA ([joelalmono@hotmail.com](mailto:joelalmono@hotmail.com); 978-902-6285)

My name is Father Joel Almonó, rector of Grace Episcopal Church in Lawrence, and a leader of the Merrimack Valley Interfaith Team. We're a coalition of church leaders from Andover, North Andover and Lawrence that formed after the Sept. 13, 2018 gas disaster. Our group, along with our state and federal legislators, asked Columbia Gas to extend the deadline for the MassSave enhanced incentives in our three communities until December 31, 2020.

Our understanding is that the EEAC needs to approve the extension. I'm here to ask you to approve the Columbia Gas request, and let you know why it's important to the community.

From our perspective, the goal has been to help our communities after the gas disaster, by offering no cost insulation and air sealing, providing extra resources for things like pre-weatherization barriers, and doing increased marketing of the program. Overall, the goal has been to increase participation in the MassSave program.

It's had reasonable success in Andover and North Andover, but more can be done.

In Lawrence participation rates are much lower. We believe an extension of the program is needed to give the community the chance to respond to increased marketing, and to take advantage of any extra funds offered for the pre-weatherization barriers.

On marketing, much more will be done in 2020. Last year, time was lost since Columbia Gas didn't get their marketing fully up and running until the end of July, and additional channels could have been used to really reach the community. Columbia Gas should continue their efforts, and they'll be joined by the City of Lawrence as a Municipal Partner to market MassSave in our city. Also, Grace Episcopal Church received a donation from our diocese for the Interfaith Team to do marketing. We believe outreach and marketing is the key to increasing participation rates – by using commonly used communication channels, more information in Spanish, and doing more to reach landlords – so the program is known and accessible. We'll have a much better chance to do this now in 2020.

With the extension, we also ask the EEAC to make sure funds are available to mitigate the pre-weatherization barriers. Easier access to these resources will make the process go more smoothly.

We're still dealing with the gas disaster – residents were evacuated again last fall with a new major gas leak and then Columbia Gas had to go back to homes to check if abandoned pipelines were properly capped. And now we have years of road repair ahead. To take advantage of the MassSave program, we need an extension of the enhanced incentives deadline. For the Greater Lawrence community, we ask you to give it your approval. Thank you.